



ANNO 1524

Latvian Academic Library



The library premises in the Dome Cathedral from 1553 to 1891

The foundation document of the library (1524)

Anno in xcciii^o v^o mensis ianuarij m^o diebus Ga. consensit n^o hinc
 hinc Nāme Gess na angesteden bēke vāg demē Bernie Pfister
 Gess and hantwrengt des Luffhans, veyser, vnd vrschreyer, Herzog
 Pāuel Beckinger Hochmeister des Sents vnd gubirke vō dem gē-
 mine bēke In erste ein bōck
 Bernia pars tertia in expositione hinc
 Sexta pars
 Bernia pars Hungaria
 In. Nicol. Augustini Berniard opa
 Opera Lipsiani
 Gess veyserliche bēke sijn by my to hinc hinc them geman-
 bēke, all sijn in motig des Luffhans vndes to vorderde
 ete the veyserliche vno die kēschensbēke der gubirke



The first four books preserved from the Riga Town Library (1524)

Through the course of centuries

The Latvian Academic Library (LAL) is the oldest scientific establishment not only in Riga but also in the Baltics. It was founded during the Reformation on 6 March 1524 when five books from the Franciscan monastery were put in charge of the Riga Town Council. The books were handed over to Nicolaus Ramm, the minister of the Latvian Lutheran parish "to be used for general benefit of the society".

In the beginning, the librarian worked in the library only in his free time and without a fixed pay. The library did not have its own budget, and the Riga Town Council allotted the necessary funding for each separate case. In 1553 the library was situated above the vestry in the eastern wing of the cloister of the Dome Cathedral. Due to it, many citizens of Riga thought that the library was a part of the church. An old inscription in one of the books of the former Dominican monastery indicates that a reader had borrowed *a church book* in 1574.

The name *Riga Town Library* came into use slowly. We can find an expressive description of the library name in the book written by Johann Friedrich Willisch in 1743, "Up to now the unknown and hidden ... Riga Town Library".

In the very beginning donations were almost the only, but later a very important source of building the library collection. Nicolaus Mollyn, who was invited from Antwerp, started to work in Riga in 1588. His printing house can be considered the first stable acquisitions source. Mollyn's astrological prognosticon, published in 1592, started a collection of calendars. In the 17th century, the library regularly received dissertations of teachers of the Dome school and the Grammar school, publications of speeches of debates and festive meetings, as well as books of Riga publishers.

During the first two hundred years, the library collection grew slowly and contained several hundred books. The collection consisted mainly of religious books in Latin. There were also works of medieval philosophers, authors of antiquity as well as books on medicine and history. This collection can be regarded as the beginning of a research library.

In 1664 the Riga Town Council established the first rules regulating the borrowing of books. The town officials were allowed to borrow books on payment in gold or silver money. Other readers could not borrow books; they were allowed to read them at the library on *regular days*. Readers were dissatisfied with it, as the library was open only two hours a week. Then the library was without heating, therefore people were able to read books at the library only in warm weather.

In the 1760s only 24 books were borrowed in three years. The library collections grew fast from 5 000 items in 1735 to 11 500 items in the 1780s. Under the influence of the Enlightenment ideas, people's interest in social sciences increased, as well as their wish to learn more about the Baltics, its history and people. The most active citizens wanted to turn the library into the centre of Riga's public life.

As a result, new rules of the use of the book collection of the Riga Town Library were approved in 1845. The library was open four hours a week, and readers were allowed to borrow two books for four weeks. The number of book borrowings grew very fast reaching 1070 books in 1846. It testifies how much citizens of Riga needed books.

In 1900 the library had 100 000 volumes. Scientific literature, mostly in German, was predominant in the library. On the eve of the Revolution of 1905—1907, inspection of the library was carried out, and it was decided to obtain more books in Latvian. In 1919 the Latvian language was introduced in the library office work.

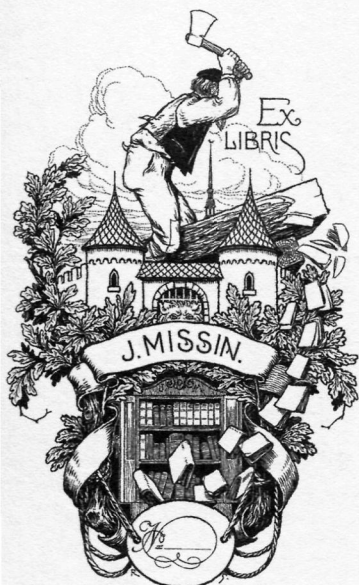
Some dates relevant to the history of Latvia and the library: in 1945 the Riga Town Library was renamed the *State Historical Library*, in 1946 - the *Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, founded in 1524*; but in 1992 it was renamed the *Latvian Academic Library* due to the new functions of the Academy of Sciences and the library.



Book of hours (France; the 15th century)



The first book printed in Riga (1588)



J. Mišiņš' ex libris.
Artist R. Zariņš

The Mišiņš Library

The Mišiņš Library is the oldest and most complete repository of the Latvian literature. It was founded on 19 September 1885 when Jānis Mišiņš, Latvian bibliophile and bibliographer, received permission from the governor of Vidzeme to open a private library in his father's farmstead *Krāces*. In fact, Mišiņš had been lending books for reading to neighbouring residents since 1880.

In 1906 Mišiņš moved to Riga with a part of his collection. Then his library had already become the biggest repository of Latvian books. Jānis Mišiņš used to visit any place where he might get a book, and if he found anything useful, he tried to possess it with admirable persistence.

From 1919 to 1921, Mišiņš kept his book collection in several flats at Skolas iela 25. However, there was not enough space for all the books. Lack of money did not allow him to create a modern library. On 7 December 1925, an agreement was made between Mišiņš and the Riga City Council, and the library was given over to Riga city; then the library inventory book had 28 000 entries.

After the Mišiņš Library was officially opened to public on 2 March 1928, it became an outstanding cultural centre. Almost all leading Latvian writers, artists and scholars of that time were its readers, among them: Jānis Rainis, Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, Aleksandrs Čaks, Jānis Endzelīns. Poet Aleksandrs Čaks wrote, "Readers came and went like a colourful, warm river. Some people came here only once, due to necessity, some others — several times. The library is as equal necessity for some people's satisfaction as a café for some wealthy ladies and a pub for many men. They have grown together with the library's quiet air, its books and walls with pictures in an inseparable and firm unity."

In the summer of 1945, the library with its 77 000 volumes moved to new premises at Skolas iela 3. On 5 June 1946, the

Vecja un jauna
Latka = Gramata

us
to 1831 mu Gaddu
pehž Jezus Peedsimschanas,

kam 365 beenas irr;
tā šaraktita,
ka ta wišā kursemmē, Widsemmē un Zelfšōš,
kur katweeschi bšhw, berriga irr,
un kurrā

Swehtkūš un Darbadeenas, Saules-
un Mehnes-Lehtchanu un No-eeschanu,
Deenas Garumu, Mehnes-Starpas
un Gaifa-Nojehgšchanas

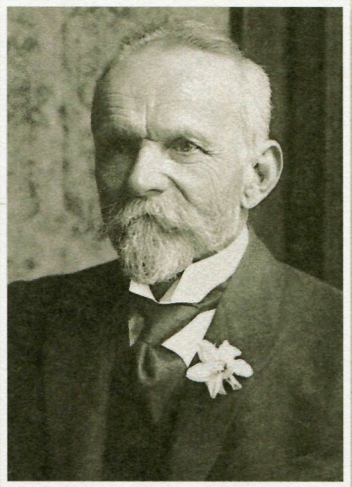
warr atrašt.



Feb. 1882

Jelgawā

pee Jāhna Br. Steffenhagen un Debla.



Jānis Misiņš (1862-1945)

Calendar "Veca un jauna laika grāmata" for 1831

Misiņš Library was placed under the authority of the newly established Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR; in 1992 the Misiņš Library became a library within a library and now its official title is the Misiņš Library of the Latvian Academic Library. Its holdings consist of nearly one million items, of which 300 000 are books.

About 30% of all the books of the Misiņš Library are fiction in Latvian or other languages published in Latvia as well as works by Latvian authors published abroad. The collection of publications of the historical chronicle by Henricus Livonicus in Latvian, Latin, German, English, Russian and Estonian is stored in the Misiņš Library. The collection's oldest publication of the chronicle was printed in German in Magdeburg in 1747.

The library building at Rūpniecības iela 10



The library building at Liepārdes iela 24



The library premises in the Dome Cathedral from 1553 to 1891

The preserved treasures

The Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Latvian Academic Library keeps more than 32 000 books and about 18 000 manuscripts. It should be noted that the foundation of the library was not a coincidence - Riga was not an outlying district of Europe in the early 16th century. Citizens of Riga exchanged letters with Martin Luther, Erasmus and other eminent scholars of Europe.



Diversity in the streets of Riga.
Drawing by Brotze (1770s-1790s)

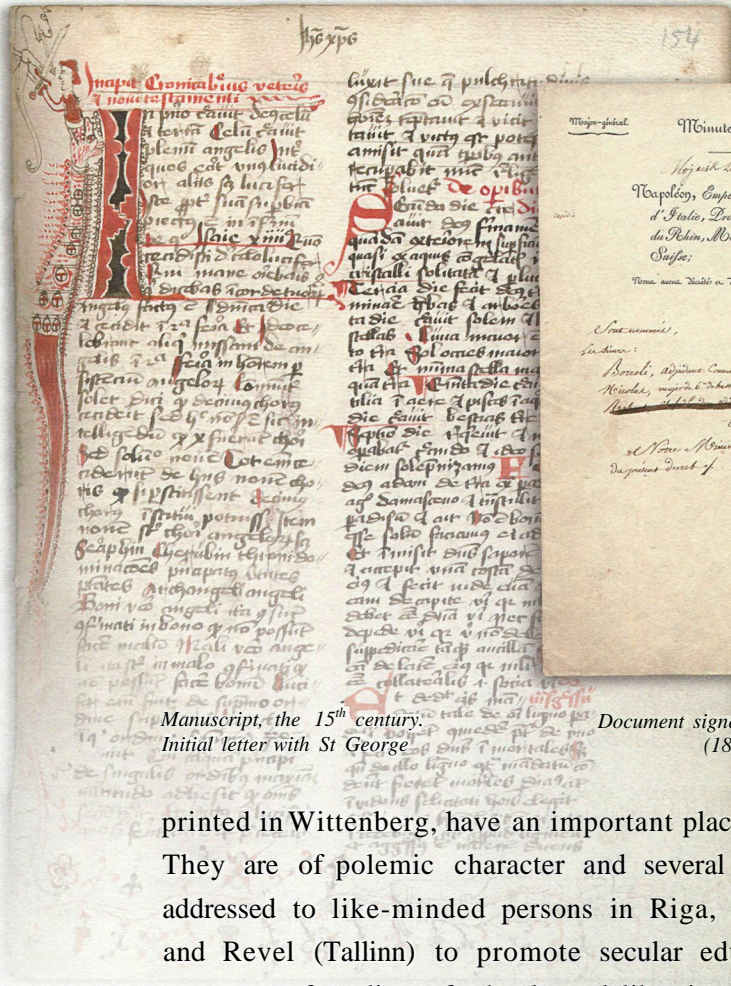
Valuable copies of old chronicles in Latin were obtained from the former Roman Catholic churches and monasteries in Riga, e.g. *Psalterium Davidis* and *Parabolaes Salomonis* written in the end of the 13th century. Such manuscript prices were extremely high. For example, 170 calfskins were necessary to print the Bible on vellum, and its price was approximately the same as a carpenter's yearly income in Leipzig.

Every library is proud of its incunabula: books that were made from the middle of the 15th century to 1500 - during Gutenberg's time. There are 210 incunabula in the Latvian Academic Library. The oldest incunabulum in Latvia - one page from a textbook in Latin *Catholicon* — was possibly printed in Mainz in 1460 by Gutenberg himself.

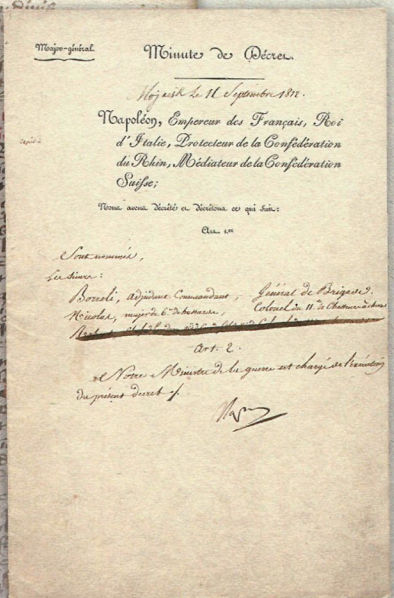
The library incunabula are on very different themes. The library holdings include works of Thomas Aquinas (13 publications), Albert the Great, Bonaventura and other medieval philosophers, as well as Bibles, different religious treatises and descriptions of lives of saints. The antique literature is represented by works of Livy, Horace, Ovid and Vergilio and Seneca's letters.

Several incunabula should be singled out, among them the parchment edition of *Missale Viburgense* printed in Lübeck in 1500. It is printed in black and white colours and has seven woodcut initial letters. It is the only copy known in the world.

The library has publications of the first part of the 16th century — post-incunabula books. Martin Luther's works,



Manuscript, the 15th century.
Initial letter with St George



Document signed by Napoleon (1812)

printed in Wittenberg, have an important place among them. They are of polemic character and several of them were addressed to like-minded persons in Riga, Dorpat (Tartu) and Riga (Tallinn) to promote secular education and to encourage founding of schools and libraries. The collection of post-incunabula books also includes works of Erasmus, Petrarck, Juvenal, Cicero and Aesop.

The unique collection of Johann Christoph Brotze (1742—1823), teacher of the former Riga lycée, is very valuable to the history of Riga and Latvia. It was purchased by the Riga Town Library after his death. The collection includes 10 big volumes of his *Sammlung verschiedener Liefländischer Monumente...* containing 3130 pages with drawings, watercolours, descriptions and documents reflecting not only the history of Riga but also the history of Latvia and Estonia. People's interest in the unique Latvian cultural values, depicted in Brotze's collection, is growing as the increasing number of electronic and photocopies reveal.

The LAL holds archive of the prominent Baltic German public figure Garlieb Merkel: his manuscripts, sketches, notes and wide correspondence, including letters to and by Johann Gottfried Herder, who worked at Riga Dome school and Riga Town Library from 1765 to 1769. The collection of autographs of distinguished statesmen, writers, scholars and public figures is rich and interesting, including Martin Luther's letter written to Riga in 1540, decrees signed by Peter I, Catherine II, Napoleon etc.

The present

The role of libraries in providing access to information is growing in the 21st century. Changes in the society require new approach and new forms of work. Today the Latvian Academic Library is a universal research library that has more than 3 000 000 items of printed matter, electronic publications, audiovisual material, manuscripts and other types of documents in 69 languages. The library provides free access to information by effective use of financial, technological and human resources. The LAL is open to everybody: researchers and university teaching staff (about 30% of users), students (45% of users), other interested people and even pupils. Now the library has 25 000 registered users. Erudite librarians work at the LAL who help their readers to find and select the necessary literature.

Integration of information technologies in the society requires effective improvement of work at the LAL. The library is user-friendly providing operative access to information and precisely ensuring its users' needs. Bibliographic and full-text CD-ROM and on-line databases have an important place among other material, they are: EBSCO Online, STN International, ISI Web of KNOWLEDGE, Engineering Village, Chem Village, NAIS and Lursoft. The library creates and maintains on-line bibliographic databases: *Informācijas avoti Latvijā (Information Sources in Latvia)*, *Latvijas sabiedrība, notikumi zinātnē un kultūrā (Society of Latvia, Events in Science and Culture)* etc.

Interlibrary Loans is a means of international library co-operation. Interlibrary Loan Department provides its users with literature that is not available in the LAL. The necessary material — any books, journals or separate articles — can be ordered from foreign libraries or document supply centres.

The LAL also collects documents of grey literature. Latvian database of grey literature (dissertations, conference and workshop proceedings) can be viewed in the LAL home page.

The Department of Austrian and Swiss Literature is the cultural and media centre of these countries in Latvia. The collection of Austrian literature consists of 3 450 items of



Reading-room at Lielvārdes iela 24



The Misiņš Library reading-room at Rūpniecības iela 10

printed matter, and Swiss — of 800 items. Open stacks and a comfortable reading-room are at readers' disposal. The collections contain books of contemporary Austrian and Swiss literature, books on history, regional history, politics, art and architecture as well as CDs and video-films.

The Bibliographic Research Department compiles and publishes bibliographic indexes: series of biobibliographies *Latvijas zinātnieki (Latvian Researchers)*, retrospective publications *Latviešu periodika (Latvian Periodicals)* and others. The current bibliographic index *Foreign Periodicals in the Libraries and Information Centres of Latvia* reflects periodicals received by the largest libraries in Latvia within a year. It is the most often used index both in printed form and on-line.

Exhibitions reveal the library treasures to the society. At the same time they function as a means of international co-operation. In the course of time they have gained a wide scope and response in Latvia. Exhibitions are organised regularly in both library buildings. The library makes international exhibitions; some of them were shown in the Ukraine, Austria and Estonia.



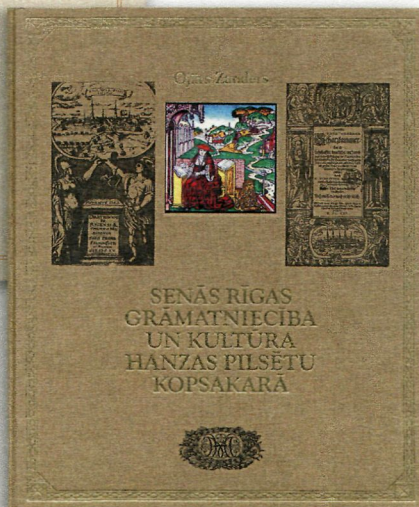
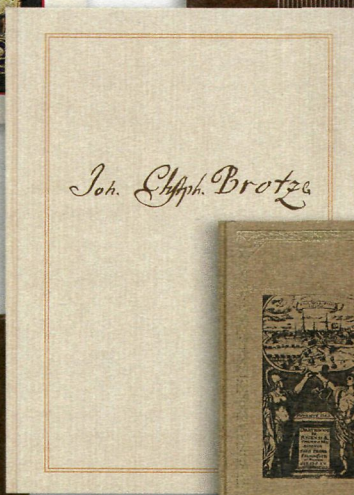
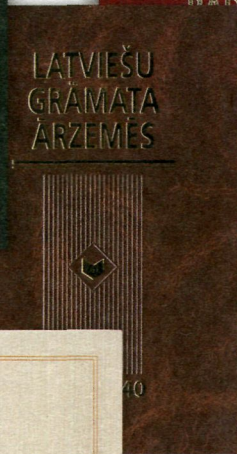
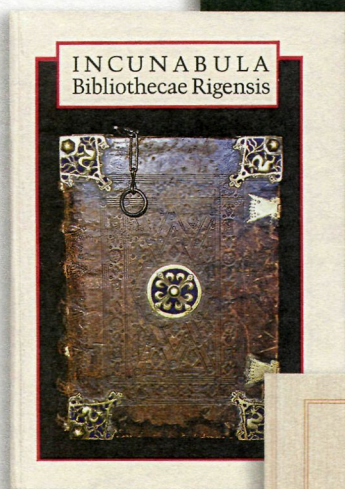
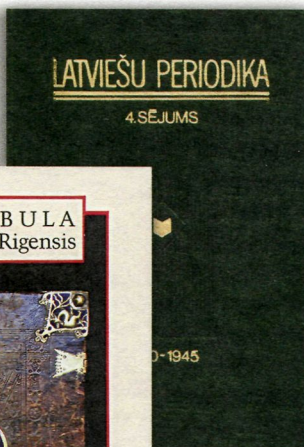
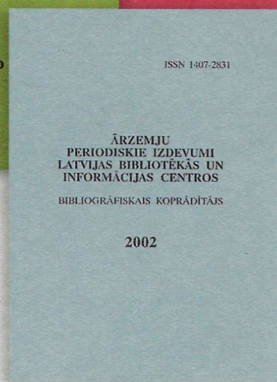
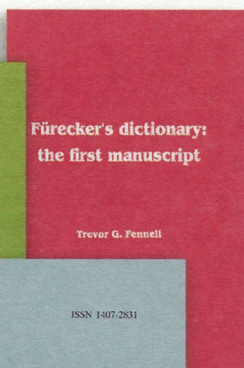
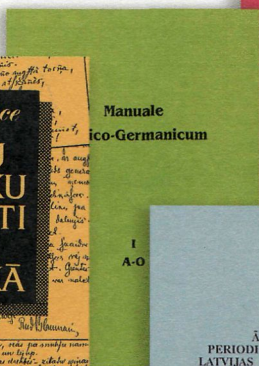
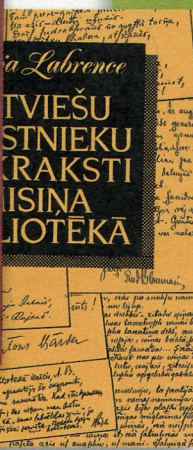
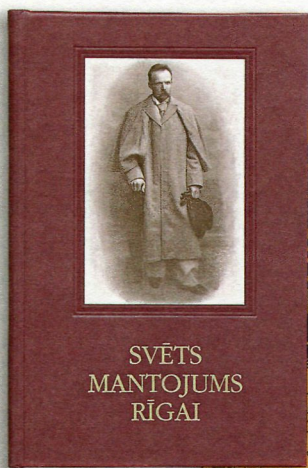
Venta Kocere, director of the Latvian Academic Library, and Prof. Ina Druvieta at the opening of the exhibition Mantojums (Heritage) in 2003

As an independent research institution, the LAL not only promotes but also carries out research work in library science, bibliography, book publishing history and information technologies. The library is a modern and reader-oriented centre of culture and knowledge. Its aim is to provide access to information to all the people and to integrate into the Unified Latvian Library Information System.

Additional services of the library

- Photocopying
- Black-and-white and colour print-outs
- Internet and computer services
- Scanning
- Binding of printed material and typographic services





Books published by the Latvian Academic Library

Library is open to readers:

Monday 10.00 - 20.00
Tuesday 10.00 - 20.00
Wednesday 10.00-20.00
Thursday 10.00 - 20.00
Friday 10.00 - 20.00
Saturday 10.00 - 17.00

Address:

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and Swiss Literature (371)7106205
Registration Desk (371)7106210

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